On Saturday, October 7, 2017, the Yale Office of Sustainability, the Yale Student Environmental Coalition (YSEC) and the Black Students Alliance at Yale (BSAY) collaborated to invite Majora Carter to speak at Yale. The event was part of BSAY’s 50th Anniversary celebrations, and highlighted the work of African Americans in environmentalism.

Carter is a leading urban revitalization strategy consultant, real estate developer, and Peabody Award winning broadcaster from the Bronx. She is responsible for the creation and implementation of numerous green infrastructure projects, policies, and job training and placement systems in her neighborhood.

Carter began her talk by explaining the phenomenon of “brain drain” in lower socio-economic cities: young and educated people of color are leaving their neighborhoods for more affluent cities. To prevent this “brain drain,” her consulting firm invested in local businesses in the Bronx to attract jobs and people to the neighborhood. She hopes to expand this neighborhood-based economic development model to other cities of lower socio-economic status.

Carter also spoke about the importance of local residents deciding for themselves how to “uplift” their neighborhoods. Her company, StartUp Box, aims to teach low-income youth computer science skills. She compared StartUp Box to generic “community centers” that are often established in lower-income areas without the input or broad consent of the community.

According to Carter, economic uplifting is more sustainable in the long term: investing in the community is a way of working within the system to uplift the people who have been ignored for so long. Although environmental justice informs Carter’s initiatives, she is interested in how intersecting influences, including economic, social and environmental factors all contribute to development and sustainability.

Carter created initiatives like StartUp Box and the Majora Carter Group to more thoughtfully represent and solve some of the problems present in the Bronx. It was especially meaningful to hear from a member of the Bronx community, who is doing work from within the borough itself.